

**Ishmael Reed:** Let me ask you something. You had a girlfriend named Lois.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Yes, I did. Yes.

**Ishmael Reed:** I think we were all sitting around and I think you were working on your book and I said, I'd publish it. It was like a dare, right? It was sort of like a dare.

**Alison Mills Newman:** In terms of what?

**Ishmael Reed:** It's like a memoir, the names have changed. Right. I said, I would publish, it was like a dare. We were all sitting around.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Oh, it was a dare? (laughter) I remember you coming over to Francisco's house. I remember that I had these writings. I ran away from Hollywood 'cause of the encounter that I had with the sacrifice for sexualization and everything in order to continue the career, so I was always a writer as well as an actress in terms of poetry, lyrics to my music. And so I didn't have much to do in terms of my art when I was with Francisco during that season 'cause it was us getting to know each other and working on his film and just that time. I guess it was one of my ways of staying connected to myself and to my creativity and I think you came over and I had some of the writing on the table. I remember you picked it up. I left the room or something and you were reading and you read it and you said, oh, yeah, you might have dared me to publish it. You might be right. But you said you wanted to publish it or you dared me to publish it or something like that. So I was taken aback and kind of amazed and really didn't know. There were things that I wrote for public consumption, like poetry and things like that. But that actual book to be really honest at the time what I was writing was just really me writing to keep myself alive creatively in a private way.

**Ishmael Reed:** I went up to Steve Cannon who became the emperor of the Lower East Side. Did you know that?

**Alison Mills:** Yes, I did. And he was definitely an emperor.

**Ishmael Reed:** He had all these people around him. He had a big organization called "Tribes." So they had the Whitney biennial, the Whitney Museum. And they put his living room, a duplicate of his living room in the Whitney and it's still. They had his own, well, he had a funky couch, so they made it all black and everything. And they had his little table where he used to run this operation and they had even at the cigarette butts and the ashtray. So it's still on exhibit. I would ask Steve for \$750. And then I asked Joe Johnson who died a few years ago. He was a poet. We're all part of "Umbra Magazine." And when, and when we disappeared, Joe Johnson went on to become a master of French and got prizes in French. Anyway, we raised \$750 each. Now I got it published. I got the book published at a printing plant in Berkeley. I remember you guys put this great picture on the cover.

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** It was in one of those little booths that you go in and you pay 50 cents back in the day. I guess they still have them.

**Ishmael Reed:** And it's got the Haitian goddess of love. Erzulie. Her VeVe's were on the cover. I sent it to Toni and she loved it. Did you think she'd go on to win the Nobel prize? Toni Morrison?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** I think anything's possible, but I was stunned, amazed and happy for Toni Morrison.

**Ishmael Reed:** Toni Morrison gave it a great quote. And then William Demby.

**Alison Mills Newman:** And I am forever grateful.

**Ishmael Reed:** I just published William Demby's book a couple of years ago. He died. I went to Rome and his son gave me permission to publish it. It's called *King Comus*. No commercial publisher would publish it.

**Ishmael Reed:** So you guys are moving from Los Angeles, San Francisco and Malibu. Those are the scenes, right? L.A., San Francisco, Malibu.

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** Berkeley.

**Ishmael Reed:** Berkeley, Malibu and Los Angeles.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Yes.

**Ishmael Reed:** Sometimes you just live at friends' houses, you bunk at people's houses. And then sometimes you live at your father's house.

**Alison Mills:** Francisco had his own home in San Francisco. So when we were in San Francisco we stayed at his house. I forgot what they call it, but maybe the townhouse, whatever. But when we, when he was traveling to Hollywood or Los Angeles to try to get his film made and produced and to try to push your book *Yellowback Radio Broke Down* we stayed at my father's house in LA. He stayed at Joy's house in Malibu. And I think he stayed at his uncle's. He had an uncle that lived in Hermosa Beach. So in the process of working to get his film made and kind of like hustling/guerrilla filmmaking to get his film made people opened their homes and hearts to us and shared the journey with us and gave us a roof over our heads, they believed in us, I guess.

**Ishmael Reed:** Well, the book is also a great statement on the Black independent film. Cause you have a lot of stuff to say about Hollywood, you call it slop and all this kind of stuff.

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** One of the things about that period in my life, was just before meeting you all and being introduced and kind of baptized into the Black Art environment I had grown up in Hollywood since I was twelve. My father didn't want me to be an actress. There was a lot that I didn't put in the book because at the time Ishmael, I was really traumatized because I grew up in Hollywood and I grew up on television and I was protected by my parents and my father didn't want me to be an actress. He said actresses were whores, but my mother insisted. And she said that she would protect me, so my father relented, and afterwards when he saw my gifting, became a big fan.

**Ishmael Reed:** What was your first role?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** My first role was in Mr. Novak. I had the title of playing Billie on Mr. Novak, I guest starred. I never was an extra. I just started kind of really at the top.

**Ishmael Reed:** How old were you?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** I was thirteen. I was prepared because I had been studying at Frank Silvera's Theatre of Being, doing workshops with Maya Angelou, Dick Anthony Williams, Max Julien. I did a play with Maya, Dick and Beah Richards and Yaphet Kotto before they all became successful. The play was a collection of Black poetry when I was 12. I grew up considering acting an art form. My Mom would have Maya, Beah and everyone from the theatre, over for dinner like family. So in addition to me having a gift, the gift was honed around really great and gifted people, genius people as well. So when I started auditioning, I was very well-prepared. Frank Silvera was a great character actor. He was able to kind of invade Hollywood through the fact that he had a persona/ physical appearance that appeared black, Mexican or Italian, or a lot of different nationalities. So he was able to get a lot of roles and have a breakthrough career. And, with that financing, I think he got from the roles he opened an acting and writing workshop, his Theatre of Being.

**Ishmael Reed:** Where was it located?

**Alison Mills Newman:** On La Cienega in L.A., The Robertson Playhouse and everyone was there. It was just an incubator tank of these great artists that went on to do amazing things

like Maya Angelou, Beah Richards, Max Julien (the Mack), Dick Anthony Williams, Durville Martin, Don Mitchell (from Ironside)

**Ishmael Reed:** How'd you land a role with Julia. The Diahann Carroll role?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** After Mr. Novak, I think I got another guest starring role. Sind you there were very few roles for black actresses. And so about five years later when I was seventeen, I think because of the work that I had done prior, I got a call to audition for the role at my home. Somehow they found my number. It might've been that they found my number through Frank because back in the day agents didn't really take on Black actors that much. I don't think I had an agent still. So I think Hollywood would call Frank because they figured, you know, all the Black actors were there. At least a lot of Black actors in LA trying preparing, wanting and dreaming for their breakthrough were there. So I think Frank Silvera was instrumental with that. But I got a call and I auditioned and it was really interesting because, there were very few roles for black women and the role was for a teenager, which I was at the time and sitting in the audition hallway is all these, you know, gorgeous, beautiful Black women. Some of whom I knew from the workshop that were like thirty and twenty and twenty-five trying to look seventeen. I understood that roles were so rare for Black women that one had to try for it regardless of age. I think I was the only teenager that was really a teenager in the appropriate age group for the role that day auditioning... But I understand that there were other teenagers that were sought out later on and the studio kind of went and did a casting call to find other teenagers.

**Ishmael Reed:** Well, what was your impression of Diahann Carroll when you met her?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** Diahann Carroll? Tall, elegant, gorgeous. I remember thinking she had the most beautiful skin. She looked at me with such love and receptivity and said that out of all the auditions, mine was the best. And she welcomed me like an aunt or mom, she welcomed me as artist to artist. I enjoyed working with her. It felt natural. I do want to say one thing that I remember very kindly most of the black people that I worked with was their receptivity, and their embracing me and bringing me into their family, you might say. Diahann invited me over to her home. I met her daughter. I hung out with her. I sat with Diahann on the top of convertible cars at the Watts parade and different parades with her and Marc Copage. She was very kind to my mother. My mother and her got along very well. I don't remember meeting her mother. I think I did.

**Ishmael Reed:** You didn't get along with your mother.

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** I had a wonderful, supportive, brilliant mother. I got along with my mother it's just that teenage period where you're wanting to become, independent step out and you have a different view of how you want to go about it. And it's just that generational universal struggle that teenagers sometimes go through at that season in their life.

**Ishmael Reed:** So what happened?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** My mother had a vision of stockings and high heels and I didn't care for stockings, and all that. (laughter). As a teen I wanted to wear my hair natural, wooly and free but my mother always wanted it to be like in a certain black, middle-class subdued, kind of style. I was into Huey Newton. She didn't really get him. She was into Martin Luther king, and marched you know in protests. So there are philosophical and dress style differences that we had. And I guess in general, I was basically rebellious towards what I considered to be at the time, old, traditional ways that she had and that she was trying to impose on me for my good. When I look back, I honor my parents dearly, always know both my parents were wonderful human beings and always had my best interest in heart. I mean, you know they meant good and it's, it's just

that, that exploring, free spirit. I had a different idea. My mother and my father are my queen and king always.

**Ishmael Reed:** Did you folks separate?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** They did. My mother never liked California. My mother was born in Charleston, West Virginia. She was a small-town girl. She liked the small town and she often said that she stayed with my father until her kids grew up. My mother was of that independent woman spirit where she shared with me that she resented in a way being a mom because there were so many things that she wanted to do and felt she couldn't do because she had children. I think she kind of vicariously lived through the fame and success that came my way, most definitely with her help and her guidance.

**Ishmael Reed:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Alison Mills Newman Newman:** I did. I had a brother and one sister.

**Ishmael Reed:** Where are they?

**Alison Mills Newman:** My sister passed away recently and we gave her a beautiful going away celebration. And my brother lives in West Virginia and he's a genius musician.

**Ishmael Reed:** You do a brilliant job with the description of characters, even the minor ones.

**Alison Mills Newman:** It's that seeing, seeing the secret things, all the little pieces, intricacies. It's like looking at a leaf.

**Ishmael Reed:** I'm talking about those two guys. You and Chris, you guys were being followed by some guys in a truck or something. That's a great scene. And you do describing these guys.

**Alison Mills Newman:** I was walking along yesterday and there were these little flowers and I just picked them up. And I just looked at the detail of it, you know, like kind of just zeroing into the details of things, how God puts things together in such a detailed, complex way, how people are... their presentation, how they dress, how they talk, the tone of their voice, the complexion of their skin, the way they walk, it's just so beautiful. It's so gorgeous to me, it's like examining all the components and the ingredients that make this person who they are, or this tree, what they are, or this piece of furniture, what it is, or this day, what it is.

**Ishmael Reed:** Chris Joy is a good friend of yours in this book.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Yes. Yeah. Chris Joy. That's not her real name.

**Ishmael Reed:** What's her real name.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Her boyfriend was a successful producer. He later produced Wall Street. He was working with Francisco to produce your book. We were working with him. Remember he was coming over and we were talking about it and stuff like that. And he was getting into it.

**Ishmael Reed:** Francisco was buying an option to *Yellowback*.

**Alison Mills Newman:** That was another thing that is mentioned in the book. I didn't want to expose it at the time.

**Ishmael Reed:** There's a scene in Chris Joy's Malibu home and this guy Dave comes in. He didn't want you guys to be there?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Oh, no. He agreed to us being there. We couldn't have been there without his agreement. He was supportive of it.

**Ishmael Reed:** But then what happened?

**Alison Mills Newman:** What happened was he expected us to be gone when he arrived. In

our youth, we weren't respectful to that. We just stayed because in our minds, he never showed up. And so one day, he did show up and we just happened to be there. We just stayed too long (laughter).

**Ishmael Reed:** You got some great scenes in Malibu, those scenes with the water and all that. The ocean.

**Alison Mills Newman:** I lived in Malibu in that house. I lived in that house for a year before I knew Francisco. Just a gift, kind of like they wanted somebody in the house.

**Ishmael Reed:** So where is Chris Joy now?

**Allison Mills Newman:** I found her on Facebook about a year ago. She's doing wonderfully well.

**Ishmael Reed:** You referred to a dancer named Bo who had a dance studio in Berkeley.

**Alison Mills Newman:** I never went to the dance studio, but they told me he had a big fantastic studio, which is pretty phenomenal for a Black guy back in those days. It was a big accomplishment to have a dance studio.

**Ishmael Reed:** When you're working on "Julia" you were living in Nichols Canyon and you were making a thousand dollars a month.

**Alison Mills Newman:** No. When, when I first started on Julia, I was seventeen, living at home and then when I got the role with the Leslie Uggams show, I moved out of my parents' house to Nicholas canyon when I was 18. I was making much more than a thousand a month. (Laughter).

**Ishmael Reed:** What did you play on Leslie Uggams show?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Oletha, her sister. There was a weekly segment called "Sugar Hill," which is pioneering historical little segment because it breathed life into the other Black situation comedies. More came into existence after that, but it was the first one. Lillian Hayman played our mother, Johnny Brown our brother, and Lincoln Kilpatrick was Leslie's husband.

**Ishmael Reed:** Was that one episode. How long did that continue?

**Alison Mills Newman:** We were on TV every week. I think it was at least thirteen weeks. It got canceled. Most shows if you didn't pass the sniff test, you were canceled after thirteen weeks. There was a lot of controversy about it. We got a lot of hate mail, and we had a competitive time slot. If I remember correctly, one of the reasons was because the segment that we did that was created as Leslie's family, it was considered demeaning. Some Black people found it demeaning.

**Ishmael Reed:** Why?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I think the idea of it being in Harlem or being in the projects. You couldn't win because with Julia, they got hate mail because she lived in a nice environment. She lived in an integrated neighborhood. She had White neighbors and Black neighbors.

**Ishmael Reed:** How long was that show? A year, two years?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I think it was just ten weeks. It didn't last very long.

**Ishmael Reed:** You got a lot of hate mail from White people for the Julia show?

**Alison Mills Newman:** White and Black.

**Ishmael Reed:** And you got hate mail for the Leslie Uggams because your show Black people in the projects?

**Alison Mills Newman:** It was honest and true to that situation. I think that's what the producers said if I remember correctly. My character got positive fanmail, the producers told me somehow.

**Ishmael Reed:** They did “Good Times” after that.

**Alison Mills Newman:** “Good Times” was kind of a break off from that but I guess America became more comfortable with time, and maybe they had a better time slot. John Amos was one of the writers on the Leslie Uggams Show. He played the father on “Good Times,” so I don't know.

**Ishmael Reed:** So when did you leave all these series? And started becoming like a singer, artist, sort of Bohemian Avant Garde hanging out with Ornette Coleman. What kind of guy was he?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Ornette was a genius, dedicated artist. Rehearsed with his band all day, every day it seemed in his loft in SoHo, wore silk shirts/pants every day, had fantastic African Art on his walls. He was esoteric, and sometimes talked in poetic riddles. I

introduced myself to him as a songwriter not an actress, and he had a piano so he asked me to play a composition...and he loved my songs and was generous to me, invited me to open up for him at some of his gigs in New York. He helped me get a record deal. Ishmael

**Ishmael Reed:** When did you meet him?

**Alison Mills Newman:** So good question. I have to go a little bit back in time to answer that question. Is that okay?

**Ishmael Reed:** Yeah. Sure.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Okay. So what happened was after I got a lot of fan mail and my career was percolating. The role that I played, the character Oletha that I played, the producer said a lot of people tuned in to see that character. So movie producers were interested in me and TV people wrote TV shows for me to guest star in kind of duplicating that character I created on Leslie Uggams show, getting typecast which was ok for a while, but I didn't want to get stuck playing that same character over and over, and I was asking my agents to not just send me out for just black roles which they thought was crazy.. but things were still going kind of well... I was working, there was an interest in building my career more. I was on the cover of black magazines. I did a guest star on “Love Boat” and “Barefoot in the Park” with Scoey Mitchell and different things like that. So.

**Ishmael Reed:** Whatever happened to Scoey Mitchell?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I really don't know, but he was a great guy.

**Ishmael Reed:** Didn't he knock out some guy?

**Alison Mills Newman:** He might have.

**Ishmael Reed:** He's from my hometown Buffalo. His father's a preacher.

**Alison Mills Newman:** Oh, didn't know that. I was an established African American actress and it was like, what do you do with Alison Mills was the running kind of idea. So, I had a meeting with my agents, I had a big agent at the time, CAA I went from really not having an agent to having one of the major agents in Hollywood. And it's still a major agency, Creative Artists Agency. The big agencies, when you get there, you're a star. And so they got me these meetings with a few producers. it's all a distressing blur. But I remember the meeting that I had with Universal. Imagine this. I'm nineteen now I'm not a kid anymore. So I'm a woman I developed into a woman and people consider me in Hollywood, an attractive woman. And so I go into the meeting and the guy says we're gonna make you into a sex symbol after the model of Marilyn Monroe or Dorothy Dandridge. I grew up in the theater. Plus I grew up watching Betty Davis, Merle Oberon and great films. You know, there weren't a lot of Black films, Black people. I grew up watching actresses in films, that told stories and it wasn't about sex. It was about stories and it was great stories...and I grew up

around Frank Silvera, doing black poetry and Shakespeare, and James Baldwin's "Amen Corner". I was a trained actress, I mean acting to me was a craft. I was not trained to be a sex symbol. I didn't want to be a sex symbol. And then I thought of my father, my father was adamant against me being an actress because when he looked at actresses, (he was a scientist) from his perception, they were whores. And so I was hearing my father's voice in these meetings. Prostitute roles, lude, no value. So I would go from being a clean teen to sexualized woman..

**Ishmael Reed:** What year was this when they offered you to be a sex symbol. Do you know the year?

**Alison Mills Newman:** The seventies.

**Ishmael Reed:** And who was the "they?" What, what, what the studio was this?

**Alison Mills Newman:** A couple, but the most traumatic one was Universal.

**Ishmael Reed:** And did you look at the script that the prostitute script?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Yes. he producer. He goes in the bathroom. He says, "oh, you read the script." He says just for you. And so he goes in the bathroom and he comes out and he's naked and lays on the floor and invites me to play with his private parts, and I'm nineteen. And there's nothing wrong with being old. It's not the fact of all of that, but it's just that I'm nineteen. I've never seen anybody old and bald headed and pot, belly naked. So that's gross on a physical level and then it was heartbreakingly degrading.

**Ishmael Reed:** So, so what was your reaction? That's what I want to know.

**Alison Mills Newman:** I don't know where this reaction came from me at nineteen years old, but my reaction was very bold and very adamant. And I spoke to him with tears in my eyes. I said, "I'm an actress. I'm not a prostitute." And he laughed at me. He laughed at me and he said, "Scruples? well, you won't go very far." I just stormed out. They had sent a limousine to pick me up. I just stormed out and I caught a cab. I had the secretary or somebody call a cab for me.

**Ishmael Reed:** And that was it for Hollywood.

**Alison Mills Newman:** That was it.

**Ishmael Reed:** Good for you.

**Alison Mills Newman:** It wasn't it yet though. I was at a crossroads. What happened was I went to my older black friends that were icons. If I mentioned their names, they are icons. They experienced the additional fame that I was about to experience, if I would sign off on the demonic sacrifice that I had to do to be the movie star of my dreams. What I always wanted to achieve truly was to be a movie star. I did, I wanted to be a movie star. I wanted to make movies. I did. So the desire to do that was inside of me. But it had a price tag. I went to all these older women that were famous and I asked them about it. I told them what I was going through. And they said, "Alison, just do it. Have sex with these producers. You're going to be a star."

**Ishmael Reed:** What, and how many, how many older women did you talk to?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I talked to two or three, the only one they told me not to do it was Leslie Uggams. I talked to Leslie about it. I talked to everybody. Everybody, anybody Black, I talked to Black women that were very famous even famous to this day. If they passed away, the whole world would remember them. They're very, very famous. the black icons in African- American acting history. One was white.

**Ishmael Reed:** There were three of them, three of them you said, right?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Yeah. They all told me to do it they told me, “Oh, sex is recreational.” I wasn't a Christian. I wasn't saved. And I didn't realize that sex was preserved for marriage. I didn't know that much, but I did believe that sex was designed to be set aside for love.

**Ishmael Reed:** What was your next move after that? After Hollywood?

**Alison Mills Newman:** You've heard about encounters. I had an encounter with God and I remember my car broke down and I called the automobile club of America.

**Ishmael Reed:** This was in San Francisco, right?

**Alison Mills Newman:** No, this is in Nichols canyon when I'm still in Hollywood and trying to make a decision.

**Ishmael Reed:** And that's when you talked about the AAA guy.

**Alison Mills Newman:** The AAA guy comes. I left that out in *Francisco* but what really truly happened was he fixed my car. He exuded all this joy and energy and beauty and light. And I grasped the fact that he wasn't famous and was happy and that I was famous, miserable and unhappy and suicidal trying to figure out, do I do this? I want to be a movie star. I want to make movies. Do I do this? And so I wanted to ask him what made him so happy?

**Ishmael Reed:** You say, do I do this? What do you mean do what?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Do I go sleep with these producers to make the movie? That was the big question of that season.

**Ishmael Reed:** How was this resolved in your mind?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I'm going to get ready to tell you. So the way it was resolved was through this angel that appeared to me because he showed me and he reminded me. He reminded me that there was a possibility to be happy without all this fame and fortune. He reminded me that there was a possibility to find purpose and meaning without Hollywood, he just reminded me without saying anything, just his presence. And then when he left, he drove down the hill. Now this is what changed my life. This is what kept me alive. when I ran down the hill to stop him, I got my courage up to ask what makes you so happy when I ran down the hill mathematically, because he drove so slow. He should have been there but he and his truck were completely gone. And the whole earth shook like an earthquake. And I heard the audible voice of Yahwe, call me by my name and say, “Alison, there goes a real star.” And so I started to weep because I didn't understand what was happening to me intellectually but I understood in some kind of spiritual way. I didn't know that the voice that was talking to me was God, and I didn't know at the time that the Black guy that was fixing my car was an angel. When I look back on it, you know, I know he was an angel, he just disappeared. And he was a Black angel. And then the audible voice of God confirmed and helped me understand what I was seeking to understand. That that unknown guy was a star. He's a star to whoever this authoritative Voice was. I didn't know the Voice was the creator of the universe at the time, but the voice was giving me a little glimpse into another reality that true stardom is not necessarily the stars that are created by man in Hollywood. There's another realm another royalty/ stardom that exists that that Voice gave me a desire to try to discover.

**Ishmael Reed:** Okay. So after this revelation, where did you go did your career go after that?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Zero. Because I left Hollywood. I went in the house screaming and I saw a vision, true story. I didn't put it in the book 'cause I was still traumatized by it and I



didn't think anyone would believe me. I've only been able to tell you what I'm telling you now, Ishmael like almost fifty years later, I couldn't talk about this for years. And so I just kept it inside of me. And so I went in the house and on the window, I saw Dorothy Dandridge and Marilyn Monroe dying. And so that sealed the deal, I got the message you know I didn't know that it was a vision from the Lord. I didn't know it was the Lord, but it was God's mercy showing me what would happen to me if I stayed. In other words, what does it profit a man or woman to gain the whole world and lose their soul..

**Ishmael Reed:** So where did the scene appear on the window? And what did you see? You saw them in their coffins or who do you see them?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I just saw them dead. I don't know how to explain it, and the vision spoke to me. This is what will happen to you, this was my destiny, death. The vision gave me clarity, If I stayed, this was my future. It was like a warning. Do not stay, get out of here.

**Ishmael Reed:** So what'd you do? How'd you get out? What'd you do next?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I called my agent and said, I'm moving to New York. and he said, "oh, are you in love?" I said, "no." I said, I'm going to die. If I stay in Hollywood, he hung up the phone on me. And so I called my mother and my father. I said, I'm going to New York. And my roommate at the time, Cindy Williams, who later became a star of Laverne and Shirley, I told her, I'm leaving. You know, don't mention this. I was being discussed in Hollywood because I was relatively famous and they were writing this stuff for me. And I was rejecting it I was being considered like ungrateful and crazy, blacklisted. And so I caught a plane and I was in New York. And that's where the art that was still in me eventually found a home. So what happened was that I had friends in New York that I had studied acting with Dick and Gloria Williams. They were starring in a play on Broadway, directed and written by Melvin van Peebles "Ain't Suppose To Die A Natural Death". So that's how I met Melvin. That's how I met Amiri Baraka and we did a play at Spirit House.

**Ishmael Reed:** Do you remember the play?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I forgot. I can't remember. I did another play, written for me by a playwright. I'm so sorry to say I don't remember his name, but Dick was in the play as well, and I agreed to do that.

**Ishmael Reed:** What was it called?

**Alison Mills Newman:** It was called "The Party at Annie Mae's House." I do remember that. It was off Broadway.

**Ishmael Reed:** And Baraka sponsored it or produced it?

**Alison Mills Newman:** No, not that play. He had a situation in Newark where I was in a play that Dick Anthony produced and we traveled and toured, and we did the play at Amiri Baraka's Spirit House.

**Ishmael Reed:** Who'd you stay with when you first went to New York?

**Alison Mills Newman:** I stayed with a model from Sweden.

**Ishmael Reed:** How'd you meet her?

**Alison Mills Newman:** Through Chris. When I told Joy I'm going to New York and she said, "Well, what are you going to do?" I said, "I don't know. I just gotta get out of here. I'm going to die." And she understood. She was one of the greatest friends I've ever had in life. And she said, "Well, Alison, stay with my friend, go stay with my friend."

**Ishmael Reed:** And how did she treat you?

**Alison Mills Newman:** The model was incredibly beautiful, very kind, snorted cocaine,

which she offered to me, but I didn't partake. She fixed the best scramble eggs. (Laughter). I stayed there a couple of months, hanging out with rich white folks, caught up in that world of being treated gloriously. To people looking in from the outside, I was still a starlet, they didn't know I turned my back on Hollywood success. There were still tv shows that I was in being aired, or about to be aired. My career was following me a little, even though I had walked away from it, people assumed I was in New York to do something professional...but they didn't know I was just there, existing, and so one day a Black lady came up to me and said, "You know, I've been watching you. And all you do is hang around White people. You need to get your soul together and be with some Black people. And I was like, wow... Just caught up, I guess. This was an anonymous person. That saw me coming and going lost in a maze of abandonment, and you know back in the day black people were watchful over their famous black folks, and didn't want you to forget where you came from..."

**Ishmael Reed:** This encounter with this woman, where did it happen?

**Alison Mills Newman:** It was in the lobby of the apartment where I stayed. I don't know, East 77th and Lexington Avenue. But I was like, "wow," but her words resonated with me. I listened. And I was like, who do I know in New York that is Black? So I called Dick and Gloria Williams, from our Theatre of Being days. and they embraced me. And that's how I got into the ocean of the black arts and being introduced to all the experiences that was my re-ushering into the world of Black artists, ('cause you know I started with black artists at age 12 with Frank Silvera). That's how I met David Henderson and David took me over to Ornette's loft one day. and it just kept flowing, and that's how I was introduced into the Black artistic world in New York.























